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SUBJECT: COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM VISITS IRAQ,
MEETS WITH MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OFFICIALS

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OR REASONS 1.4 (a), (b), (c). (d)

¶11. (S) SUMMARY: On December 5-8, 2005, Ambassador Henry A. Crumpton, the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (S/CT), visited Iraq to meet with Embassy, military, and Iraqi officials. During his visit Ambassador Crumpton met with Ministry of Interior (MOI) officials responsible for counterterrorism and election security. The Deputy Minister in charge of Police Services and the commander of the Special Police Forces briefed Ambassador Crumpton on the role their forces play in the fight against terrorism. They expressed the view that it is necessary to "fight terror with terror" and that it is critical that their forces be respected and feared, as this is what is required in Iraqi society to command authority. At the same time, they recognize the need to promote human rights and the rule of law, and say they do not want their forces to be "brutal." Ambassador Crumpton was also briefed by the Deputy Minister responsible for election security about the interagency success he has achieved in pulling together various competing organizations to formulate and successfully execute plans to protect the security of citizens wishing to vote. Ambassador Crumpton was accompanied on his visit by S/CT Regional Affairs Officer Margaret Hawthorne. END SUMMARY.

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR SPECIAL POLICE FORCES

¶12. (C) At the Ministry of Interior (MOI) Ambassador Crumpton was received by Major General Ali Ghalib, Deputy Minister for Police Services, and Major General Adnan Thabit, commander of the Special Police Forces, which include the Police Commando Brigades and the Public Order Battalions, both of which play a major role in the fight against terrorists. MG Ghalib explained that the MOI had come to the fight against terrorism late and is still trying to catch up with the insurgents, although great progress has been made. He assessed that there are three phases of terrorism: the first is the spread within society of the notion that the use of terror is legitimate; the second is the building of cells and the penetration of different levels of society to allow for movement and support; the third, and most difficult and dangerous phase, is the attack phase. Ghalib said that the Iraqis were still struggling to establish a government and institutions when the terrorists were already at phase two. But in the past six months great strides have been made. "It was as if they had us by the neck and our arms were too weak to resist. But now we have the strength not only to push them away but also to begin to punish them."

¶13. (C) Ghalib continued that the challenges faced by the MOI in battling the insurgency fall into material needs and the inherent challenge of fighting a war while trying to instill a respect for the rule of law at the same time. On the material front, the MOI needs more and better people who can fight the enemy. These officers require weapons, vehicles, radios, and tools to search vehicles at checkpoints. Ghalib said the police also need "political support" and is confident that if the political process in Iraq succeeds, terrorism will decline. He explained the difficulty in balancing a strong force and, at the same time, promoting the values of human rights and rule of law. He lamented that for the past 40 years, the people of Iraq have been ruled by a powerful police force. Accordingly, in order for this new force to be respected, it must be powerful.

"FIGHT TERROR WITH TERROR"

¶14. (C) MG Thabit, who created and commands the Special Police Forces, is a Sunni officer who served time in prison for attempting to overthrow the Saddam regime. He formed the Special Police with a number of former regime soldiers and police who "didn't have any blood on their hands" and has built them into an effective but feared unit. Thabit noted that terrorists from all over the world are coming to Iraq, that neighboring countries are facilitating their entry into Iraq, and that the insurgency has been able to feed off widespread economic problems, the fact that the security forces were dissolved, and the lack of an effective media Information Operations campaign by the government. The opposite is true for the insurgents. They have a highly

effective media campaign and, for generations, the youth of Iraq have been raised on a steady diet of militarism which makes it seem honorable to them to pick up a gun or bomb to fight. In addition, the sense of economic hopelessness that is pervasive among the young makes them easy marks to be recruited to conduct terrorist attacks for economic reasons alone.

15. (C) Thabit's philosophy on how to fight the war on terror has three basic parts: fight terror with terror; fight terror with effective Information Operations; cultivate popular support. Thabit moderated his "fight terror with terror" mantra with the acknowledgment that "we speak of power but we do not want a brutal force" and that human rights and the rule of law must be respected. He believes his forces are succeeding in the war against terrorism, as the MOI has received an increasing number of tips from the public about where to find terrorists. This is an indication that the public is beginning to trust and respect the police more. He also proudly claimed that terrorists and insurgents run when they see his forces approaching as they know they can not defeat them in face-to-face combat.

REINFORCEMENT - INTELLIGENCE - COURTS

16. (C) Ambassador Crumpton asked how Iraqi police forces are supported or reinforced if they encounter difficulties and need immediate help. Thabit explained that when local police call for help the closest Special Operations unit in the area is immediately dispatched. In addition, an MNF-I Quick Reaction Force can also be instantly deployed. Ambassador Crumpton also inquired on the use of intelligence information. Thabit replied that in general, cooperation on intelligence matters is good. MNF-I (primarily the Third Infantry Division that is deployed in Baghdad), the MOI intelligence unit, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) intelligence unit, and the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) meet at least twice weekly to share information and coordinate actions.

17. (C) Ambassador Crumpton also asked about the effectiveness of the judicial system. Both Thabit and Ghalib expressed frustration with the courts, complaining that they are too soft on terrorists and release some who should be held. Thabit again acknowledged the difficulty of balancing forceful and effective enforcement of the law and the need to protect the rights of citizens and promote the rule of law. "We don't want the courts to act on whims or to treat suspects brutally, but they must understand the nature of the fight we are in." He lamented that the courts are too weak and that this has led to a delay in defeating the terrorists. He also complained that the courts are unwilling to fully prosecute violations of anti-terrorism laws which make it illegal to incite or publicly support acts of terror. Judges are not willing to bring cases against media or religious figures who incite violence, and this is a problem. Ghalib echoed Thabit's view that "we must fight the terrorists as hard and as brutally as they fight us, but we must at the same time respect the rule of law."

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR ELECTION PLANS

18. (C) Ambassador Crumpton later met separately at the MOI with Major General Ayden, who is responsible for planning and coordinating election security plans and operations. Ayden was accompanied to the meeting by MG Adnan Asi of the INIS and two representatives from the Ministry of Defense (MOD). Ayden described the creation and evolution of the Supreme Committee for the Security of Elections. It is an interagency team comprised of members of at least eleven different entities, including MNF-I and the Embassy. Ayden explained that the committee was the first such group in Iraq to join together to work on something like this, and it was a great example of how different factions could work together to achieve positive results. In addition to working with each other, the committee must coordinate all its action perfectly with the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) and its wide variety of contractors, who select and staff polling site and handle the transportation and security of election materials.

19. (C) Ayden reported that all involved in the process are satisfied with the plan, which builds on the plans used in previous electoral events that have already taken place this year. Operational security is considered good so far. Some details of the plan are left up to local commanders, acknowledging the fact that local conditions will vary and it is not possible to come up with a "one size fits all" plan. There will be 6200 polling sites in the country, and all will be provided with security that entails three layers: police in the polling site, Iraqi Army controlling access to the perimeter, and MNF-I over the horizon ready to respond if

local forces cannot control any situation that might arise. Emergency measures that close the borders, prohibit movement, and make it illegal to carry weapons on election day have been promulgated and will be announced at the appropriate time. The surge in election security forces will begin on December 12 and all forces should be set by December 13. Ayden said he was very proud of the plan, the way multiple ministries have been able to work together, the success they encountered in the last referendum, and the fact that the Iraqis are relying more and more on themselves. He was also very grateful for the assistance provided by MNF-I.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

¶10. (C) Ambassador Crumpton asked whether the work of Ayden's committee would be continued after the election, and whether any training or educational programs were being created to train government employees about how to work together. Ayden replied that his committee will continue to plan and execute plans to protect other national events, such as holidays and pilgrimages, that attract large crowds and present targets for terrorists. As for training, MG Ghrazi, the chief of the National Joint Operations Center (NJOC), who was also present at the meeting, reported that there are currently classes funded by NATO that bring together officers from a variety of agencies and ministries.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Ayden's apparent success in forging a successful interagency process in his area of responsibility among ministries normally rife with factionalism and outright hostility and mutual suspicion is remarkable. His ability to get working level officials to look beyond sectarian distinctions and local political loyalties to work together for the common national interest is encouraging. Similarly, the dedication exhibited and the successes achieved by Thabit and Ghalib as their forces further develop the ability to combat terrorism on the front lines is also impressive. However, the difficult balance between crushing the terrorists while respecting the rule of law and the concept of human rights is not always maintained. And we remain troubled by indications that at times units commanded by Thabit cross the line. Embassy and MNF-I will continue to stress to police forces the values of human rights and the rule of law, and we will press Thabit, Ghalib and other ministry officials up to and including the Minister that police misconduct cannot be tolerated and must be punished.
KHALILZAD